Things to do:

Get trash bags and cat food.

Fix Joe’s amp.

Clean the band room.

Miss Kari.

Cry.

Try to sleep.

Something that bugs me is that there are 1000’s of pictures of Kari and I out there. From our earliest days singing together. People took pictures of us. Sometimes they would tell us or even ask us. Mostly they just walked up and took them and we didn’t mind. But we rarely got to see them. Some people said they wanted to remember us... that we were so good together. We were with a band, but they always approached Kari and I... I guess we did do most of the performing... I wish there was a way to find them all, so I could see them. I’ve been picking through computers, cameras, floppy discs and boxes of junk... looking for pieces of our life that I forgot.

On her last day, she put her money in our bank account. All of it. Eventually I figured out everything she did that day. After I left, she called two dealers and got through to one. Talked to them for a minute. She didn’t call him back, though. She had money that I didn’t know about from her parents. I guess my words and my worry got to her. She drove to the bank and deposited all of it and came back home. She just had a little stuff. So she took that little bit and divided it into two. I know I scared her, telling her how dangerous Cipro is... that she didn’t want to take any chances with me being at work. She wrote me that note, which still amazes me... and then took her hit and had a seizure... I found her on her feet later that night. On her feet. I don’t know how often that happens... but it really messed with me.

The thing is, they have a video surveillance on that ATM machine... and I can't get that damned picture from that day... because they wand a goddamned subpoena to release it. I've been begging them, calling lawyers... even the police... but I can't get it. And there's pictures of her from that last day... and I want to see them. To see what she looked like. Was she ok? Was she upset? My guess is that she just looked a little bored... maybe a little lonely, because I had just left for a long shift to get our finances back in order. But I guess I'll never know. I don't even know if they exist a year later. But I'm still going to try some more.

I think some folks might be a little tired of my writing in here. But I have a little more to do. Try and get all of these things that happened together in one big story, and hope it's readable. Because I can't make shit up... but with Kari, life was anything but boring. So that makes it easier. And I'm doing it for myself... and for the world to be introduced to her and our music. And maybe someone will read it and understand it better than I did... because there's a lot of things that I still don't get. I didn't dwell on them back then, and when we finally were happy, I didn't want to bring that stuff up... A lot of women mainly, have explained some of the things to me. And some of it makes sense. Still, hardly any of it would matter if she were still here. Living with me in the moment. Finding our happiness... our greatest work... our music... our love... starting a family... none of that old stuff would matter, until I started writing it all down... which I had always planned, believe it or not.

==========

She would detox at her parents house three times in a year. I called her parents and told them I needed help. The first time was July and that was a short one. The second time was in November. She stayed after thanksgiving and spent 2 weeks at her parents. Two hellish weeks without her.

But she got through it and I detoxed by myself without anyone here, because I'm tough and I'm not gonna let my girl down. And it was hard doing it alone... but I had done it before like that. I just worried about her every day. I had called and talked to her and texted when she felt too bad to talk. And we got through. She wanted to party on Christmas eve. She texted me and asked me. I called her and talked to her for 45 minutes at work. I told her it was a bad idea. That she had no control. She promised me over and over that she did. I told her she was stupid... but I can't stop her. If that's what you want to do then do it. But you're gonna get me some.

She paused for a moment. Did she want me back on it? "Are you sure you want to?"

“We go together baby. If you say you’ll stop the day after, I’ll stop too. You know I wouldn’t make you do it again”.

I was at work on the 23rd of December, one month of sobriety. I needed to make money for Christmas and our rent coming up with no roommate. I had to work a lot this month. She got the stuff and called me and told me that she got screwed.

I worried that she was lying.

We got high that night and I think she got high the day after on the stuff that I was supposed to get that night.

After that, it started up again like clockwork. I couldn’t believe it. Every day she would tell me she was sick and she was sorry. I was so upset with her. But I believed she wanted to stop.

Finally it was new years. We had to play a gig. We had talked about how we wanted to do this show clean. Anything but dope. Just DOPE free. She promised over and over and the days got closer and closer and finally....

“You’re fucking going to play new years high! Fuck... really??”

“we’ll get straight right after... I’m sorry Sean. I thought I had control. And I don’t. I’m sorry I did this. Please don’t let me do this again? Apparently I can’t do it. Ever.”

“What can I do baby. I can’t stop you...I don’t want you to keep it a secret and die... and I don’t want to lose you to this. I would die for you. And I know you would die for me... but would you give the dope up for me?”

“I will, baby. I will. I promise.”

“ok... so we’re going to get a little high on new years and then we get this shit over with. No more relapses. This is it. DONE!”

“ok, baby”

“OK!”

We played the gig on new years. It was a decent crowd and we rocked it. We were high, but it was amazing. I recorded it so we could see how good we were. After that gig we felt so hot for each other we couldn’t keep our hands off each other... we came home and had some hot love together... and in the morning we went to get all that band gear from the venue. She felt like shit. So I got us something so we could get through the day. We got back home and took care of our jones and came in the living room.

We put on the video from the night before and were ready to check out our great show. We watched for a few minutes and... It wasn’t at all as we remembered. We listened... and it slowly sank in. We sucked! WE SUCKED?!

The two best musicians in St Louis were playing at a little dive last night... and they were fucking pathetic. The bad notes... the missed harmonies... Kari couldn’t hit her high notes. It was miserable to watch... our mouths were open, aghast...

She looked at me with a look so serious. “Is that how we sounded? I thought we were good?”

“We were high baby. I’ve been the straight one before. and I know... it’s fucked up, but it’s true.”

“The people... I thought they were into it... but everyone looks bored! What the fuck Sean... you were there!”

“Yea, baby... and I was high, too. Now we know. And I’m as surprised as you are. This ain’t us. I’ve heard us. And this ain’t us!”

“Sean... I want you to promise me”

“Baby... never again! Right?”

“Never again. Let’s not play another gig until we get this behind us.”

“Never again, baby. I feel that. I thought we were ok, too! I didn’t think I’d hear THIS!”

“Oh my god! Turn it off… I need to get myself psyched. This is not what I want. I love playing with you. I want to be your songbird! And that was just fucking awful!”

“Baby… you’re the best singer in this town. You’re the best singer for 400 miles in every direction. I’ve heard them all. This isn’t you. I know this. We’re gonna get it back. But fuck it. It happened. We’re gonna get some more shit tonight, and tomorrow it’s over. I’ll stay home with you and we’ll stop for good. No fucking more. OK?”

“I’ve never been more serious. No more. I love you and our life… our music. I can’t be this train-wreck anymore. FUCK! FUCK THIS SHIT!”

“FUCK THIS SHIT, baby.”

We laughed together. We knew we meant it. We knew we would be ok. We were in love and we had the world at our feet. I had the best woman in the world. She had a man that loved her, that she loved just as much. Nothing could make this fail. We wanted it and we would have it.

The next day I had to work and I got up early. She wanted me to hook it up again. I wasn’t sure about what should happen.

“So when are we gonna stop baby?”

“Well, you have to work today, so you gotta do that. And I can’t stop if you aren’t. So I guess hook us up this morning and we’ll try to figure this out tonight.”

I drove to the city. And I did the deed. I drove 50 miles, more than the distance to my job and back. We got fixed and I went to work.

Later she called me at work. We talked for a while and then she asked me if I was going to hook up on the way home. I honestly didn't see how I couldn't. I had to work and she had to sleep with me.

This went on for two months. Her birthday came and we were broke from doing stuff. I got her roses and drugs. I was sad because I couldn't get her more, but she understood. We were still in love. But it was sad. It wasn't the amazing thing it had been for the last 16 years. SIXTEEN fucking years. We mentioned this maybe once.

"This is our sixteenth year baby!"

"I can't believe it!"

"I know!"

"I was 19 when you met me... and you were 35! You dirty old man!"

"And now... you're the same age I was when I met you"

"Wow... that's so hard to believe. I'm the same age you were when you met me all those years ago!"

"yea"

"Do you remember the night you met me?"

"How could I forget that!"

"Do you remember what you said to me?"

"Not really... what did I say?"

“We had played our first set together and I was so, SO into you! And your friend Cliff was there in the bar, sitting alone by himself looking miserable! And I said I wanted you to stay with me and play all night... and you said ‘hold on a second’ and you went over to him and it looked like you said two or three words... he looked at you all shocked... I could tell he said ‘really?!?’... and then he got up and walked out the door. You came over to the side of the stage where I was at and said ‘Sean! Dude! Relax! You’re already getting laid!”

“Bwahahahah... I said that! I was so crazy then. But I knew I wanted you. And I wanted you to relax! Did it work?”

“It was fucking GENIUS! Yes... I had the best time I ever had with another girl... singer... anyone! It was amazing baby. You’re amazing.”

“Awww... isn’t it so strange that we have grown up together. Like, I am a completely different person than I was back then”

“I know... it’s true. You’re my angel. My songbird”.

“I love you, Sean.”

“I love you Kari. Happy birthday, my love.”

I spent her birthday with her and she posted on facebook early in the morning with a picture of the flowers;

“I know that not too many people give a shit that my fiancee got me a dozen roses for my birthday and he does every year but I'm documenting it because it's part of my life and part of what I experienced. And it made me cry and after all these years somebody still cares about me, just like my parents sing me happy birthday every morning of my birthday even though I'm 35 today. I'm posting this not because anyone else cares but because I care.”

I didn’t get to see that post. I was too busy working that day. I didn’t have a computer at work that I could surf on and I was working my ass off to get the rent

taken care of, which was 1,200 that month, because our roommate had moved out without any warning. I hardly got on facebook at all. I was stressed and sad because we were back on the stuff. It bothered me and I know I let it show.

January came and February started. The flowers wilted and Kari took them and tied them together and hung them upside down on our closet door knob. She had saved every bouquet of roses I had ever gotten her and every bouquet that her first love had gotten her. She had a museum of dried flowers that only she could tell you where and who they all came from.

She let one flower in the vase that looked better than the rest. A few days later is had dried and wilted. I was working as always...

She posted the picture on Facebook of the wilted rose.... bent over and sad looking. She wrote “This is how I feel”... and I never saw it. I wish I had. I would have asked her about it. Talked to her. It could have changed everything. But I wasn’t on Facebook. I wasn’t there because that was something I did when I felt good about my life. When I had something to share other than the shame of addiction and working 10-12 hours a day to cover that and our bills... and now only regret for working that much.

I worked hard double shifts every day for that month. I didn’t know what to do. I was stressed and sad that we were back in this place again. We were using, when for over a month, just the month before, we were sober and JUST getting our life back again. I tried to be the happy guy I had been for years, but it was wearing on me. I didn’t want to be in this again. I started hinting that I wanted her to go back to her folks and detox. She said they didn’t want her. That they told her they didn’t want to see her this way again. I still asked her every day. It was February and I knew what that meant. Ned.

It was the month that Ned died. For YEARS, I had tried to make February special for her. Her first love had died on the 12th and weeks or days before, I could feel the grief and depression come over her. Just the year before she had told me that I had made it all better. That she loved me more than she ever thought possible. She loved me MORE than she loved Ned. Now we were back in this rabbit hole with drugs and I had to work every day to get our bills paid and buy drugs every day.

She understood. But it still was hard. For the many years before I had worked at home and been around ALWAYS... But now we needed money every day and lots of it. And the only job that would do that was the one I was at. Fixing vintage stereo

systems in ST Louis... something I enjoyed... but not this much. I wanted to be home with my girl. I wanted a roommate and I wanted my life to be easier and sober.

Like magic a guy showed up and moved in and we were able to relax a little. Jonathan was a nice guy, even though he had no idea about what was going on with Kari and I. He was a sweet hippie guy that worked hard and allowed us to spend more precious time together.

Valentines day came and went with more flowers and me working to get us money for drugs. I wanted to do more, but it was getting crazy again and I wanted it over. I begged her every day. She sent her valentines e-card to me on facebook and I didnt even see it until the day after. I was sad.

Kari said to me “Maybe I should go do that again at my parents house”

“Really baby?”

“Do you want me to?”

“I want to be better, you know that. I cry all the time, darling. I want our life to be easy. For us to play music again. I haven’t booked any gigs in two months you know?”

“I know... and I know why”

“I want US back baby… I’m ready. Please go do it. I will stop. I’ll take off work. We have a roommate now and I can do that. I don’t want this anymore. I don’t want to lose you”

“ok. I’ll do it, but this is the LAST time Sean. I love you more than life itself, but this has to end”

“Baby? Have I ever made you do drugs? I only ever came back from Colorado because you promised you would stop this. It’s all I’ve ever wanted!”

“Ok... you’re a good man, Sean. I’ve put you through hell. I’m so sorry baby. One thing about it is that I miss you SO BAD when I’m there!”

“Baby, you have no idea. I detox without you here, completely alone. And I wake up and look for you... and it’s so hard! And I want to talk to you, but I’m afraid to call because I’ll make your parents mad. And EVERY day I wake up and have a panic attack!”

“Why do you have a panic attack?”

“Because you’re not here. And I think that you’re not coming back. That your parents will tell you to leave me... or you’ll decide that you don’t want a junkie boyfriend. I know you’ve told me that getting clean is something you do for yourself... but maybe I don’t love myself that much. But I love YOU that much. When I do it, I think of you. I do it for you. And I do it for our baby that we haven’t had yet. Our little red headed baby that can sing her ABC’s and make people cry like you do!”

“Oh Sean!”

“Just get it done this time baby. We’re getting straight fentanyl. It’s a motherfucker to get off of. This is the first time we’re coming off straight fenny. And I don’t think you realize how much this is gonna suck!”

“I’ll be alright. I have to be. I won’t be able to leave. I’ll be in the middle of the fucking wilderness with no car! I’ll have no choice!”

“I’ll be doing it too, baby. And you’ll have your folks. I won’t have anything but my morning panic and my job. I really do love you, bird. Please let’s get on with our romance and our life!”

“I’m sorry. I Know it’s been me, too. We’ll get that all back. I promise!”

“I love you more than life, baby”

It was mid February, one year ago when she went back to her parents for the third time. They were worried that she had come back so soon. But they dealt with it. It was hard. Fentanyl was so much harder to get off of.

I had to work to make the bills and she was already detoxing at her parents and extremely uncomfortable... anxious and in pain. And I had to tell her that I worked that day... which meant that I had to use. She got SO angry at me. I told her that I would be straight when she came back home, but I needed to make some money to pad us during this detox.

She had also taken all of my benzos. I needed to knock myself out. The fentanyl detox was like having broken glass under my skin. I couldn't sleep and the pain was horrific. She called me the second day and I was still waiting. "You're STILL DOING IT! Sean, I'm not coming back until you're done. I'll just get my stuff and move in here. I will NOT come back to that again!"

"Baby! I've never been that guy. I've NEVER told you I would do something and back out. I need benzos. I have to get some sleep and put myself down for this detox!"

"SEAN! Do you know that I haven't slept the entire time I've been here? I fucking am, in AGONY! I could take 20 xanax and with my tolerance I would be wide awake! Mom gave me ONE xanax today"

"I'm so sorry baby. I gave you all of my benzos and I need some. I'm going to do it! I've NEVER let you down!"

"I'm not coming home until you're done, Sean"

"I won't ask you to, darling. I'll do it tomorrow"

The next day came and I called off work. A friend came through with four Klonopins in the nick of time. But four was just a small amount and I would have to deal with the detox mostly awake and climbing the walls. Fentanyl was the worst. SO much anxiety and SO much pain and skin crawlies. But I did it. And I was so relieved when I hit the third day. I knew I would make it. I was still in pain and the jones was so

strong... but I had done this 100 times at this point. And every time I craved anything, I thought of my beautiful wife and the baby that we wanted... and I would cry at the thought... that we hadn't had one yet and it was our 16th fucking year together... that so much time had been frittered away and we loved each other enough to deal with anything... I took my last benzo on the fourth night and got some sleep and went to work the next day and talked to Kari all day on facebook messenger. Her phone wouldn't work at her parents. It was the middle of nowhere and they had satellite internet and a land line.

She wanted me to bring her some pot and I had some that I'd been saving for literally years. I used to love pot, but I hadn't smoked it in so long.

I drove up to her parents the next day before work. I brought her the little care package and we hung out in her parents living room until I had to leave. Kari was still feeling it more than me. She had been doing a lot more and taking money out of our bank account the last while... she had fallen off hard. And she was paying for it now. I sat with her and it felt like our first date again. It was awkward, but sweet. I held her hand and kissed her lightly. She apologized. She still felt like hell. She had just stopped puking the night before and the xanax did almost nothing for her, since she was addicted to them as well. We talked about our lives and little things... the cats. And she was adorable. Very awake. Very self conscious and shy and awkward... things I hadn't seen in years. Was she ashamed? Probably... but I could see the affection in her eyes and the love that had been numbed and emotions that had been muffled for so long.

"Are you sure you want me to come back?"

"Baby, are you serious? Do you not want to?"

"I love you more than anything"

"Then we'll be fine! I love you darling!"

"But why? I'm not worth your love. I don't deserve you."

"Why? because you're my soulmate and my best friend. You're my best friend, baby! I come home at the end of the day and you're not there and I lose it! I have a

panic attack every day because I’m scared you’re not coming back... that I’ll lose you. That something will happen and I’ll lose you... like that time when we lived here! And you RAN-”

“SEAN! I’m not going anywhere. I just wanted to know you wanted me back with you.”

“I can’t live without you baby! Shit... I gotta go and work”

“It’s fine! Thank you for bringing me some pot! I really needed it. My brother in law brought me some of his special clone stuff but I did it already... so thank you”

“Thank you for doing this, baby.”

“Sean. I want our lives back too!”

“I’m so proud of you. I know what you went through. You went through what I couldn’t handle myself. And you did it wide awake and for days in a row. I can’t imagine! I couldn’t do it! I needed the benzos. It was too hard. And you fucking did it here and wide awake... I’m in awe of you, my beautiful bird!”

“Ok. I love you. Go to work!”

We had been sitting on her parents loveseat and we touched each other constantly... holding hands felt electric... like we were 13 years old and it was the most amazing thing. We touched and never let go the whole time... just needing the comfort of the others’ touch.

I was driving back to work. a half hour away and she texted me to say she was sorry she was so strange. I told her she was anything but strange. I said that even though we were as awkward as two teenagers together for the first time, her eyes shone bright and she held my gaze and we talked the way we used to talk years ago... and it made me want to cry for all the years that we had wasted.

I told her that the last time I had picked up stuff for us, I saw a guy that I used to buy off of years ago. He was a dealer of Mitch’s. And she remembered Mitch. It was our first dealer that we used. And I hadn’t seen the guy in many years. He was

psyched to see me... he was a decent dude. Easy going black kid, too smart for the ghetto, but not smart enough to make his way other than being a good and discreet drug dealer. He asked me about the guy that used to come with me. “You mean Ron with the bald head?”

“Yea! Ron! That’s right!”

“Yea... he went to rehab and died his first night out”

“aw no shit! man...”

“yea... I heard about it when I was in Colorado”

“shiit. he was ok.”

“So what happened to your boy Mitch?”

“He in jail. For a long ass time!”

“Aww shit... well... I kinda figured that”

“Yea... this shit ain’t no joke!”

Kari heard the story and said “fuck! Sean! I was so close this last time! It could have been me!”

“I know baby. That’s why I ‘m so proud of you. You turned it around. For some reason we get a second chance and no one has to die! I love you so much baby!”

“You know what I want?”

“What?”

“When I get back, and we get this behind us and look like ourselves again... I want engagement pictures. Real ones! Like professional!”

“That would be awesome baby!”

“Promise me!”

“I promise, my love. I’m at work now. I have to go in. I will see you soon. Text or call at any time. I’ll be here all day and night. We need the money. I feel like total shit, but working makes me feel better.”

“I can’t see how you’re even doing it. I just stopped puking!”

“I didn’t do it like you did it baby. in fact... I...”

“What Sean?”

“I only did it because you were. I didn’t want to do it at all. Sometimes you relapse and I get so sad... and I know you hate it when I do that stuff. I act like a fucking idiot. I know you hate it... so that’s why I did it. I wanted you to stop.”

“I believe you. I believe everything you tell me. You’ve never lied to me”

“No. I haven’t.”

I went to work and talked throughout the day with her. She was already sounding better. Two days later I was heading down to get her. I wasn’t sure she was ready, but she said she was and she sounded sober and calm.

I waited for her down in the lower driveway on her parents ranch and her father brought her down in their golf cart. They talked for a few and hugged. Then she got in and smiled.

“Hey handsome!”

“hey beautiful!”

“Dad likes you now!”

“no! really?”

“yea. He told me to be good and I said I would be. He started crying!”

“Really?”

“Yes! I think he’s really worried about me. He asked me if I would be ok and I said you would take care of me. He asked me who would take care of you and I said that I would! And he said that he trusted you. And I asked him ‘So do you like Sean now?’ and he said ‘yea, he’s growing on me’. My dad hasn’t EVER liked any man I’ve been with! That was a big deal!”

“Wow... yea. I guess that’s progress! man... you look so good baby!”

“really?”

“My god yes! How do you do it! I still feel like hell and I look like hell... shit... I know it. I’m SO done with this.”

“I didn’t want to say it. But you... you... oh god... ugh... you were starting to look your age. When you dropped me off... you had been up for days... you were so stressed and strung out... and I was worried. You didn’t look so good. That’s why I said that about the engagement pics. You look great now, though!”

“I love you, Bird... I love you so goddamned much!”

She looked down for a moment.

“Why?” she said in a low somber tone that came out of nowhere.

“Why? You’ve asked me that a lot lately. Either I’m not showing it, or you’re feeling pretty bad about this.”

“Why do you love me, Sean? I feel terrible. I almost killed you. I almost killed myself. I drug us through hell again. And you still love me? I don’t know if I deserve to be loved. I’ve been terrible to you. I’ve been terrible for you. You were sober so many times and I drug you back in... even if you did it to show me how you felt... you didn’t need that. I didn’t need to do ANY of that. You’ve saved my life so many times.... what have I done for you, Sean?”

“You showed me what real love is, Kari. In all of our years together... you’re the only one I’ve ever bared my soul to. You listen to everything I say. You make me feel like I’m a fucking king. We’ve practically grown up together. I hate being away from you for an hour. You being over here for two weeks... that was pure hell!

It’s obvious that I don’t do well without you. We kick ass on stage. You are my muse. We write songs that are amazing... we love the same music. How would I ever find anyone like this? Any ONE of those things would be amazing. I think we belong together.”

“We do. You’re the only man that’s ever known me. The only one that knows everything. And I can’t believe you’re still with me.”

“You’re my girl. You’re my bird.”

“And you’re my music man!”

“are you hungry?”

“Not yet... you want something?”

“yea..”

We went through a drive through and she told me to turn down a street we were near. We went down the street and we wound up at Jefferson Barracks cemetary. The place where all the soldiers were buried.

“Have you ever seen my Grandpa’s grave?”

“No.”

“Let’s go. I never had a chance to introduce you to him.”

We walked around the massive complex of stones, that all looked identical... and about 15 minutes later... “I found it!”

We sat at her Grandpa’s grave for a few minutes as she talked to him like he was sitting right next to us. I thought it was so sweet. That it mattered to her to introduce me to her Grandpa that I never met. That it was sad that she was talking to a dead person... but since that time I’ve done the same with her 100s of times myself. We got chilly and went home. We were tired. We were off drugs and I felt like my songbird was finally home.

I cooked for her later that night. She was on the Atkins diet and needed things made for her without carbs. I was able to cook the recipes she wanted and she let me. We had a walk later that night and cuddled. And made love around midnight.

The next morning I had to go back to work. We still were behind with bills and money because of all the time I had taken off to detox and take care of her. I worked about 11 hours each day and when I came home we talked for a few but coming off of drugs and being shaky and physically weak, I usually fell asleep pretty fast after I got back. I felt terrible about it... but I had to catch us up.

I went to work 11 days straight and Kari was not happy about me being gone so much. And she started acting out.... acting depressed. Then I felt something was wrong and it followed me for a few days. She wasn't acting right to me. She wasn't being the love-struck girl I knew... and she didn't miss me like she used to. Like she had only days ago. I feared the worst.

I was at home and it was almost the end of February. I logged into our bank account and checked it thoroughly. I found she had been taking cash out every day. Cash withdrawals. She denied it weakly for a while but I looked at her with eyes that only showed pain. She stopped talking and lying. She sat next to me. With an expression that let me know it was true.

"So you're doing the shit again already?"

"Yes"

"Babe... it's only been a few days"

"I know... I get so depressed when you're gone, though. No one's here and all I can hear is that voice in my head... go get some shit!"

"I need you to stop. You hid it from me! You've never HID it. That's dangerous! That's just wrong! Oh babe..." I started to cry.

"I hate it when you say BABE like that. I'm so sorry, Sean... I feel terrible!"

"So are you stuck again? Are you hooked? How long?"

"A week"

"FUCK... ok. ok. fine. I'm not keeping money in the bank anymore unless we have a bill coming out. I'm gonna get you shit in the morning and I'm gonna get some too."

“Sean! no! Don’t do it!”

“Fuck it... what do I care about my life. One of us is gonna fucking die... maybe if it’s me, you’ll straighten your shit up”

“Sean... don’t say that! I’m so sorry!” she sounded serious and sad, near tears.

“We’re only going to do it until I get this month’s rent in. I’m going to have to work 12 hour days... but I’ll do it. And after this next two weeks, we’re going to stay here and do this for real. And you’re not going to go back!”

“Ok. I was doing ok, though, Sean. I just fell off for a minute.”

“You never fall off for a minute. You fall off until I catch you or something bad happens. I mean it. We’re going to stop. Or you’re gonna watch me die. My LIFE DOESN’T MEAN ANYTHING WITHOUT YOU!”

“Sean... ok. Ok. I’m sorry. Ok. Just tell me what day.”

“Two weeks from today.”

I woke up early the next morning and she was up already. She was sick too. I got up and got dressed. Kissed her a bland kiss that said I love you, but I am disappointed. And drove to the city. I got a small amount of stuff and came home. She wasn’t happy at the amount, but I told her that we weren’t doing any more.

I actually bought a big bag because it was cheaper. But was only giving out a little at a time. I came home that night and she was already climbing the walls and had texted me many times while I was at work, until I did something I had ever done, and turned my phone off.

I got home and she had missed me. She was happy to have me home. To have anybody home and I felt bad for leaving her here all day. For turning off my phone. This was my wife. For better or worse. She is obviously sick and doesn't want to be, and I knew about this before I started this relationship anew. I didn’t know what to

do. I was mad at her. But I loved her more than anything. I wanted to tell her, but before I could she had taken the few beans and disappeared into the bathroom. I sniffed one cap and it felt alien. It felt like poison. I was still taking subs. I didn't want it to work. I wanted to just do it but not get anything from it. To not act like an idiot and act like I was out of my head and scare her. It went up my nose and burned. It made my body feel strange, and out of sorts. All I could think of was how bad I wanted this to be over. To get our life back. To just be done. I wanted it so badly... but I wanted her with me. What did this life mean without her? Why had this lasted 16 years, through the biggest and best moments either of us had ever known? My nose burned and I pinched it with my fingers and as my eyes watered from it, and they kept watering... was I crying? I didn't even know... and then I did. I started to cry... hard. And harder... and harder.

The whole unseemly shit show came into focus... 16 years... no family, still desperately in love, but still TRAPPED! I heaved in sobs... that she couldn't hear with the water running. I heard her cuss. I heard her cuss minutes later. She was in there 45 minutes. And every minute seemed to put more weight on me. More tears... more worry, more stress, more desperation... finally she came out. Not looking good. Looking sad.

"Kari?"

She looked at me, somewhat foggy and disconnected. her eyes didn't meet mine.

"I love you."

"I love you too" she said without looking up, automatically, obviously a little high. She looked up and saw that my face was swollen and grotesque from crying.

"No Kari... I love you. More than I love myself. And I don't know what to do. You make me think you don't care about me or yourself. And for 16 years, I've never felt like this. I love you SO FUCKING much."

"Can we have this talk in the morning, Sean... I am tired finally and I think I can sleep. I slept hardly at all the last three nights"

"No... listen to me. Listen to me! Look! Look at me!"

“What!? OK!”

“You go into that room and close the door and my body tightens up. I can’t do anything. I can’t do anything! I don’t even breathe! I listen to make sure you’re moving in there. That you’re O...K!!" my face twisted with the last word as I tried to hold in the emotion, turning my head away as the sickly muted, weeping noises were pushed down with quick raspy breaths that rattled and gurgled, "And I sit here. Hoping that you’re ok... that you’re conscious. The longer I don’t hear you, the more I am scared, until I hear you again. I don’t dare go in there... god forbid I violate your privacy to save your LIFE... but I want to so much of the time and just make sure you’re still there and not on the floor, like all the other TI-IMES... and... FUCK! And then. I pray. I FUCKING pray.”

“You’re an atheist, baby”

“YES! You’re right, I’m a FUCKING PRAYING ATHEIST! That’s what I’ve become! I fucking pray! Because I’ve done everything else a man can do... I’ve overdosed in front of you... I’ve cried, begged, screamed, thrown things... and you walk in there and it’s literally the only thing left. So I FUCKING pray!”

“For what?”

“I pray that you’ll wanna stop! That you’ll actually do it. That it’ll be important enough for you to clean up for us... for yourself... for me... for our life together... so we can be the way we used to be. I pray that you still love me”

“Sean, I do-”

“And I pray that we’ll get past this and be that couple we’ve always been... I pray that you stay clean this time and a few years down the road we have a little red headed baby girl that we love more than anything in this fucking world! That we put this fucking shit so far behind us that we joke about it and it seems like something that happened to somebody else... not us! Not this amazing, loving, perfect family! That’s what I pray for. And then you’re in there... you’re in there for 15-20 minutes. And I hear you cursing and I know you can’t find a place to hit... and I know you’ve been in there a half hour poking holes in your little fingers and there’s no place LEEEFT... and you keep searching... And I don’t want you to do it, but I sit there

praying that you can find a place to hit... so you won't be SO FUCKING SAD when you come out of there... because it's the saddest fucking thing that I've ever seen in my fucking long life... and I try to keep it together... but I get in my van and drive to work and bawl my fucking eyes out... and again when I come home and cop for you again... and you go back in that fucking room and close the door again... for another half hour... hour... poking more holes in your pretty fingers... cursing when you can't find one, and I feel it! I feel how HOPELESS you are in there poking more and more holes... and I can't FUCKING DO ANYTHING! I can't help you, I've done everything I can do... said everything I can, and just want you to see what I see and HOW MUCH I really love you and HOW MUCH it kills me and once and for all say FUCK IT! I think I've had enough! I don't want to hurt myself anymore. I don't want to hurt you anymore. I'm finally DONE! That's what I pray for."

And I fell on my knees... completely wracked in sobs... and she came to me.

"Sean.... baby. Tomorrow. Let's do it tomorrow. I'm ready. I'm so sorry. I mean it. you're such a good man. I'm sorry. Forgive me. It'll be hell. But I want to." I was relieved to see the tears in her eyes. That there was maybe something behind her words besides wasted breath.

"Ok baby" my voice croaked quietly.

We went to sleep and woke up in the morning with a wicked jones coming on. We realized that we had no way to do what we wanted and I went to get one last bag and we used the rest of the day getting ready to do it. We got all the things we needed and Kari wanted to get some dolls to dress up like the cast of "The Vampire Diaries"... so I took her to a doll store. And then to a department store toy aisle... and another department store toy aisle... and another... and six hours later I looked at her with this look that said "please kill me" and she took pity and said "OH you big baby! Fine, let's go home!"

We got home in the evening and prepared everything we would need for the next four days. Liquids, immodium, non narcotic pain killers, benzos, vitamin supplements, and I bought a netflix subscription so we could have something to pass the time better. Kari started playing with her dolls... sewing costumes and adding things to their faces, beards, sideburns... hair... haircuts... accessories... weapons... I found a movie about Stephen Hawking. It was amazing. I tried to get her to watch it with me. She came in for a few minutes and her eyes glazed over and she left to go back in her hobby room and create the cast of "The Vampire Diaries" in doll form. She came in three hours later, after the movie was over and I had slept for a while. I was pissed. This was our last night together for a while. We

slept for a while... woke up and realized we weren't doing drugs today and it scared me... and as the dread of the next days set in, I started the movie over again and we became lost in that romantic and tragically sad movie about Stephen Hawking... "This movie is amazing" she said. "I know... I tried to tell you".

"I'm sorry Sean. I'm so goddamned sorry. I want it to end. I want to stop being this person. The stuff changes me. I remember seeing this exact scene last night when you called me in here and I couldn't focus on it... I felt pissed that you would even try to interest me in this... I'm so fucked up. I've lost track of what's important. It's amazing..."

We watched the rest of the movie and I could tell it touched her in a way that would have been impossible the day before... in the midst of this drug... this drug that had taken nearly everything from us. We took a few benzos and slept for a while. When she woke up her thumb was on fire.

"My thumb hurts!"

"really?"

"yea! I think the cat scratched me or something. It may be infected!"

"Let me see."

She let me see it, and it looked red and swollen. It looked like a small boil on the surface.

"Does it hurt?"

"yes! it really does!"

"Shit... what are you gonna do?"

"I'm scared... I'm going to the hospital"

“ok. Am I coming?”

“do you feel ok?”

“Not really... but I don’t want you to be alone if you want me there”

“No... just stay here and I’ll be back in a bit”

“I miss you already” I said.

She left for the hospital and called me in an hour and a half.

“Guess what?”

“What?”
“I’ve got a MRSA infection!”

“How the hell?”

“They said it could be from the kitten scratching or anything dirty”

“Shit.. so they’re gonna put you on antibiotics?”

“yes. strong ones. I have to go to the pharmacy and pick them up”

“Ok... I love you darling. I’m so sorry!”

“It’ll be ok. Just a little more we have to deal with”

They lanced and drained her thumb at the hospital and she picked up her antibiotics. They wanted her to stay, but Kari detested hospitals. While she was waiting for the pills, she called up her parents and told them she needed money for the scripts. She told them the problem and they sent the money out immediately.

We lay in the bed for over four days, waiting for the worst to end. Finally it looked like we were going to be ok. It had been a full week since I worked. Kari's thumb was wrapped and she only complained about it a few times. We got through the detox together and we had only used for a short time. It wasn't easy, still, but it wasn't the dreadful thing that it had been weeks before. I was feeling loopy still and the benzo's made me so sleepy for days... but I decided I had to go back to work. Kari had been strangely silent during this time, and it worried me. But I know I was not feeling myself... the stress and fear, the worry, and dealing with my own sobriety made me different. Less intuitive and more inside myself, feeling my own discomfort and not watching. It was part of the change... the small difference in me that kept me from my usual intuition. The psychic bond between us was interrupted by my discomfort and trying to help myself get through this again. It was just weeks ago that Kari told me those words, "It changes all of us" and I realized that. I didn't want to be that guy. No matter what. If she falls back again, I won't be the one. I didn't say this to her. I admit I was kind of stuck in my own head, but only to get well enough to look after her.

"I think I have to go back to work baby. Are you going to be ok? I don't feel myself yet, but we have to get the rent taken care of and everything else. I don't even know if I have a job! But I don't think he wouldn't fire me. But I have some explaining to do."

"I'll be fine, Sean. I'm taking my meds and it's actually looking a lot better. You know, this kind of infection kills so many people. I'm glad I finally went to the hospital. Are you sure you're ok to go back? You're not going to fall back?"

"No baby. I don't want to do this anymore. I still want to get away from everything. Do you still want to have a baby with me?"

"I don't know anymore. I want to, but I wonder if I'll be a good mother. And it seems like that's so far away."

"There's no one on this earth that I've ever wanted to have a child with, baby. If not you, than I guess I won't ever. And are you kidding me? Look at the way you are with the cats and even ME! You're a wonderful person Kari."

“I’m not that wonderful, Sean. I’ve done so many things that I’m not proud of. I love you, but even I can’t explain how I’ve treated you.”

“It changes everyone, baby. And we’re still feeling it and it’s still responsible for how we feel today... this bad fucking demon... it’s still in my head and I want it gone. I want us back. You’ve given me the best years of my life, even with this problem that’s cursed us for so long. I want it all gone... something we don’t even talk about... not because we avoid it, but because it doesn’t matter anymore.”

“We definitely need a vacation from this shit.”... she paused and looked down as we sat in the bed. She looked at me with her eyes dewey and clear again... bluer than they had been in years, “I’m sorry, Sean. I’m gonna get better. I love you more than anything in the world and I wanna prove it.”

“You have no idea how much it means to me to hear you say that. I’ve been so worried that we were headed towards something... that you were going to leave... that there was something I wasn’t aware of... I’ve never doubted us, before. It was such a horrible dismal feeling.”

“I know, baby. It was true. I was so fucked up. I thought you were doing stuff all the time behind my back. I thought you were seeing other women. I thought so many fucked up things and even told them to other people... but all that disappeared when I got sober. Baby, I was crazy! It’s like you said. I was a fucking criminal! My mind had slipped so far that I was destroying the best thing in my life. I fucking stole from you! UGH... oh god!” she put her head into her hands...

“Hey...” I put my arms around her.

“You are my wife. That’s how I think of you. There is nothing that could make me give up on you or us... we’re always a team. I can’t make it without you. That’s one thing this has taught me. Missing you for all those days you were at your parents... it really drove it home and drove both of us crazy! All the things we fought about... I don’t remember any of it. What did we fight about?”

“Two parakeets! haha I don't remember!”

“Yea. Pretty much. Two parakeets in a cage. Fighting about god knows what... I guess I better head in to work then.”

“ooooh... I’m gonna miss you. I don’t feel myself yet. It’s so hard when you’re gone. Just my thoughts and demons to keep me company. But I love our house. Don’t worry about me. I got this!”

“I know you do, baby. Let’s just be good. Not BORING... but good. And have the life we deserve. I make enough money for us to do this alone, here, but all the other things that we do keeps me working like a slave and missing you and our sweet simple life we had just months ago...”

“I’ll get a job, Sean. Just let me deal with this for a month or two. I can’t stay home all day when you work. It’ll drive me crazy! But for right now I need to get my head straight. You understand, don’t you?”

“Of course baby. There’s nothing more important to me than you. You have to be OK. I hope that you know this and never doubt it. It’s the only reason I involved your parents.”

“I’m gonna try to get a little more rest and then I’m gonna clean for a bit. My thumb hurts so bad, though. But I need to do something. Gotta keep moving and get my mind and body back. Do you think the diet is working?”

“Of course, baby. It is. And you know I think you’re the sexiest woman on the planet. I would rather you be healthy. You know that the diet will make you weaker in some ways. It’s a little dangerous. You’re also on your meds for the infection... and those are wicked strong. MRSA is a man made infection. It was the product of the over-use of antibiotics... they gave antibiotics to so many people and also LIVESTOCK, that the bacteria mutated to be resistant to the drugs and now we have bacteria that are extremely hard to kill! Thanks to PEOPLE!”

“Wow... I knew that, but hadn’t thought about it.”

“That’s why you have to be good. You can’t fall off now. All of these things are not in your favor. And I know what you said about how you got that infection... that the new kitten scratched you... I don’t think it was the kitten baby. That was where you

were shooting at the time. You've never had an infection like this before, but you never were this weak before. It was from the needle, baby."

"I thought about that. It was the doctor that said it was probably the cat. I don't know if he knew that I am an opiate addict. I think it's in my file though."

"Fuck... just be careful, my love. Every day we live is another day in which we've never been that old before. That's what I deal with every day. People come in with receivers and I tell them what's wrong, and they say "That never happened before!" and I say, yea, well it's never been this old before! That's where we are now. I love you very much. I have to get to work, I guess."

"ok. I miss talking like this. I'll call or text you in a bit. Text me when you get there so I know you made it ok"

"ok darling!"

She stood up and we met at the foot of the bed... put our arms around each other and I put my finger under her chin and pressed my lips against hers... her lips had puffed up in the last several months. She was so happy when it happened. She told me, took pictures of herself, posted about it in her addicts support group on facebook... and every day she would send me a picture of her saying how much better she felt and she was starting to look like Kari again.

"I remember you wanted to have some professional engagement pics done... remember telling me that?"

"yes!"

"I want to do that. I was too worried about you at that time for it to register, but I love the idea of doing that. I love the idea that you WANT to do that. We are a pretty sexy couple, aren't we?"

"we'll be better in a few months. In so many ways."

“yep. Ok baby. Talk to you in a bit.”

“ok”

We kissed a quick husband and wife kiss and I walked out to my van and drove to work.

Work felt strange after all of the days of being at home and sick. I felt weak and the temperature was always too hot or too cold... I would shiver and sweat at the same time. I walked in with my tools and the boss seemed surprised.

“Hey stranger!” I said.

“Hello! So... tell me something”

“uh huh”

“Do you like working here?”

“Yea. It’s fun and I think we both get something from it. Yea, I like working here. It’s like the largest music store in the world. Pretty sure I belong here.”

“You do. But you need to take it a little more seriously. I basically leave it all up to you, when you want to come in and for how long, because I figure you have a life and other things you do for money. But I need someone who will be more able to do the work when I need it. Did you get paid for that Tape machine?”

“Yes. But it got swallowed up in the bank by bills and fees and my wife was sick this week. I had to get her meds and take care of her for that time.”

“That’s not my problem. You’re going to have to take care of that ASAP. I’m going to hold half of your money I’m paying you every day until it’s taken care of.”

“Ok... that’s fine. Please understand. I didn’t have a choice. You know I’d never screw you over. I’ve reminded you when I owed you money that you forgot about. This was different. Completely.”

“I know... that’s why you’re here. If I couldn’t trust you, I wouldn’t allow you to access nearly everything of value in this place or trust you to walk out the door with things I haven’t been paid for, but this is a big deal! I needed that. You know, someone in a different position would even call this embezzlement... even have you arrested. But I’m not that person... you just need to get your priorities straight.”

“Gene... I think you know my character. I’m not the most responsible person in the world... or even reliable sometimes, when it comes to putting in tons of hours... but I HAD to do this. I had no choice and given the chance, I would do it again. I love my wife more than anything. And money isn’t even an issue here... it’s making sure she’s ok. That’s all. Please... if you want to be mad, just be mad. Don’t insult my character or make this out to be something it’s not. I don’t want to quit, but if anyone else had said what you said to me, I would have already been in my car.”

“Ok... ok. I don’t think you’re dishonest. We know that. Let’s just get this all taken care of and we’ll carry on. We make too much money off of each other to mess this up with a stupid squabble. It’ll be fine, and I hope your wife is doing better.”

“Yea... me too.”

“What’s up with her?”

“An infection. A bad one. Scaring the liver out of me.”

“Yea... those can hurt”

“Yea... and it does.”

“Did they give her anything for pain?”

“No. She tries not to do painkillers.”

“Good for her.”

“Ok. Gonna get started.”

I texted Kari when I got to the repair office and told her I made it. I told her I was in trouble over the tape deck I had sold. She asked if it was bad. I said it was, kind of. “Can you send me a picture of your thumb? Send me the nastiest one you can. I want to show him and make him feel bad.”

She took the bandage off and took some pics and sent them to me and I was shocked. She had a dime sized hole in her thumb that looked like it went all the way to the bone.

I called her phone.

“Baby!”

“What?”

“I thought you said it was better??”

“It is!”

“It looks so much worse than I thought. Holy shit baby. Don’t miss your antibiotics. Maybe not worry about your diet. You just need to be healthy. You need to get over this and so many other things. Shit... I’m going to worry all day. That’s bad, baby! Are you sure it’s getting better?”

“yes, Sean. It hurts a lot, but it’s getting better. It looked so bad after they lanced it. It was scary as fuck. All the fluid that came out... uuuhg.”

“Ok... as long as you know it’s getting better. As long as you’re sure. That could become blood borne and spread. Just be careful and knock off the diet until you’re better!”

“I’m not quitting the diet, Sean... it’s working and I want to feel sexy land like my old self again. I don’t even recognize the person in the mirror after this long... I’ll be fine!”

“You’re so stubborn. Ok... I guess I’m gonna show these to the boss. I’m sure they’ll shut him up. They freaked me out!”

“OK, love you. byebye”

I showed my boss the pics she sent me and he grimmaced and covered his eyes with his hand.

“Yea, that’s bad. Looks painful. I hope she feels better.”

I fell into my work for a while and time passed pretty quickly. It felt ok to be back at the place... it kept me busy and I couldn’t just loaf there... there was always something that needed immediate attention... so the minutes and hours ticked by and something was missing. Kari. She hadn’t sent a text or anything for hours. I texted her and waited. Did another project. Checked. Texted her again. Nothing. I tried calling and it went straight to voicemail. Shit. Her phone died and she didn’t know. That’s what’s up. It happened the month before and I ran out of work and sped home to find her using the toilet. So that’s what’s probably happening. A tinge of doubt crept into my head.

I pulled all of the money out of our account. I’m carrying 2,000 in my wallet. She doesn’t have any way of getting anything... maybe gas... but... shit. Call me baby.

I started to worry. And the worry became more acute. I wasn’t concentrating on the tape deck. I was staring off into space, with my imagination running wild. My head was still foggy from the benzos and the recent detox... I get emotional when I detox. I think everyone does. So I convinced myself that’s what it was. That I was feeling the depression and the pain of my feelings returning. She’s ok. She’s always ok. I called her again. And again. Left a few messages. Texted. I stood up. And just stood

there. Wondering what to do. I know I looked as if I was a thousand miles away. I was standing there, staring into the wall in the office... and I had just come back to work. I had been chewed out for being absent and unreliable and spending money that wasn't mine... And... I'm leaving. I grabbed my coat and my left my tools. I jogged past the boss out in the lobby.

"I have to go home. Sorry." I said as quickly as I could as I broke into a run, leaving his disbelieving face behind, as I showed zero concern for a job I already had abandoned for ten days... And ran out to the van, jumped in and sped off...

I was driving down the avenue to the highway and passing cars... driving like a jerk. I thought about my job for a moment. Wondering if I had just lost it... hmm... maybe... don't care... I floored the gas pedal.

I was driving between 75 and 90 MPH on the highway. Passing cars and asking to be pulled over... I was texting at the same time... calling... texting... I left a message on her voice mail. I had just put the phone to my ear when the van jerked and I heard the deep, low crunch and grinding sound... and realized I had hit a guard rail. The van rocked violently and weaved in the lane, tires squealing, shuddering and fish-tailing until it straightened out again with a jolt that left me stunned. I grabbed my phone so tight that it creaked. YOU DUMB SHIT, I thought... you know you're already too late... If she OD'd she's already gone. And here you are speeding like an idiot and trying to cash yourself in as well?? Stupid stupid stupid... "AHH!"

I was as tight as a coiled spring, ready to break. Adrenaline pumping... fear, stress, anxiety... oh baby... baby... baby... baby... talk to me. So scared. I texted her once more. "I just wrecked my van. I was so worried. It's time to stop being stupid baby! NO MORE!"... I sent it and thought about it. Why did you just send a text to a dead girl? "AAAGH"! The feeing was so intense. Like a premonition. I wanted to scream... I wanted to break down or break in two... but mostly I wanted to talk to her. To save her. To save US. I was nearing my exit and heart was pounding my head. I flew into the driveway... trying to get there fast enough. Fast enough for what ever was in my head. I got out and heard the alarm from the septic system. I heard the water on in the bathroom. Oh god. How long had he water been on that it caused the alarm to go off? It felt like I was walking in slow motion as the sounds disappeared behind the thudding of my heart and my head was light as the adrenaline course... I put the key noiselessly in the slot... I couldn't hear anything anymore... it was like i was out of my own body. I opened the door and walked down the hall. The bathroom door was closed. I pulled out a penny and unlocked and opened the door...